



Fw: The dangers posed by unconventional gas drilling in Pennsylvania
Eliska Postell to: Jeannine Graff

02/24/2012 11:31 AM

From: Eliska Postell/DC/USEPA/US
To: Jeannine Graff/R3/USEPA/US@EPA
History: This message has been forwarded.

FYI

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----- Forwarded by Eliska Postell/DC/USEPA/US on 02/24/2012 11:31 AM -----

Message Information

Date 02/24/2012 11:18 AM
From Patrick Walker

Ex. 6 - Personal Privacy

To LisaP Jackson/DC/USEPA/US@EPA
"president@whitehouse.gov" <president@whitehouse.gov>

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cc

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Subject The dangers posed by unconventional gas drilling in Pennsylvania

Message Body

Dear Administrator Jackson:

In general, I applaud your appointment to head the EPA and the work you have done so far. In particular, I applaud the EPA's intervention in Dimock, where a politically dominated, irresponsible PA Department of Environmental Protection has sided with the gas industry, denying delivery of safe, clean water to people in whose wells several independent tests, including one by the EPA, have provided evidence of contamination.

However, I have begun to worry about President Obama's environmental policies, and I also wonder whether pressure from the top has begun to hamstring your own efforts to protect our badly endangered environment, both nationally and in Pennsylvania. For example, President Obama's State of the Union address was hardly a comfort to environmentalists; highly esteemed climate change blogger Joe Romm had already expressed deep skepticism on whether the President would mention climate change at all. As things turned out, he mentioned it just once, only to say that any progress on the issue was politically impossible now.

What a world of fence-sitting and political cowardice is concealed in that little statement! We're talking about the world's gravest environmental problem, estimated by a peer-reviewed UN-affiliated study to kill roughly 315,000 human beings annually; every day of inaction is a day the problem grows graver. In President Obama's position, I would have used my bully pulpit to proclaim the necessity of climate change action to the American public, and to denounce climate change deniers--and especially the industries that fund climate change denial--as the enemies of the common good that they are. President Obama also announced an "all of the above" energy policy, fatal to the environment if executed, that differs not a whit in description from Sarah Palin's.

In the context of this deeply disturbing SOTU address, a friend, included in the cc above, sent me a similarly disturbing talk you gave recently in New Jersey that is the precise reason why I'm wondering if you've been pressured from above to back off on your previously proactive defense of our environment. In that talk, you expressed frighteningly sanguine view over the potential safety of unconventional gas drilling under exclusively state regulation. To be sure, you cited New York State, where environmentalists have been by far the most proactive in the nation--but it seems highly disingenuous on your part to glibly assume most states fit this pattern. Pennsylvania, where you've already had to step in, has--under "drill, baby, drill" Republicans, many of whom deny climate change--been an utter nightmare.

You've already had unproductive dealings with DEP Secretary Michael Krancer, whose DEP underlings have admitted under oath issuing drilling permits after 35 minutes (!) of review. Secretary Krancer has spoken at Chamber of Commerce breakfasts touting the industry he is sworn by oath to regulate; at a meeting with him I attended with fellow environmentalists, he parroted the deceitful gas industry mantra that we needn't worry, "because they've been doing this a long time." When I mentioned to current PA energy czar Patrick Henderson studies revealing that, due to fugitive methane leaks, fracked natural gas could be worse for climate change than coal, he dismissively said, "We can't let that affect what we do here in PA." Amendments to PA's antiquated Oil & Gas Act, used to impose on our state a combo of technologies invented years AFTER its passage, were passed, after closed committee negotiations, on the recommendation of a Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission marked by its pro-drilling bias; it did not include a single public health official or representative of PA's most prominent--and worried--environmental groups.

Worst of all, the same legislation that amends the Oil & Gas Act, HB 1950, in return for a piddling--and contingent--drilling impact fee, strips PA municipalities of what limited abilities they previously had to zone drilling under the unamended O & G Act. In other words, we're at the mercy of well and pad setbacks, hours of operation, etc. arbitrarily set by a governor and legislators whose campaigns were heavily contibuted to by the drilling industry. Given your own previous dealings with Secretary Krancer's DEP, you can imagine what level of protection against a powerful, dangerous, relatively experimental technology that offers us.

Not thinking gas activists alone had the potential numbers to fight back, I joined the Occupy Wall Street movement, where political views like mine are rapidly gaining traction. To wit, President Obama's environmental and progressive-issues actions and views are NOT such as to inspire our confidence. If he does not improve, specifically by demanding proactive EPA oversight in the "unsafe drilling" state of Pennsylvania--NOTHING like our responsible neighbor New York--the Occupy movement here is very willing not only to not vote for him, but to work zealously for his defeat. Sure, Republican rule would be horrible, but it's certain to vastly grow our movement and permanently discredit Republicans. IF President Obama cannot pledge us "change we can believe in"--particularly an end to the dangers of corporate-dictated energy policies, we find the consolation prize of a vastly expanded movement QUITE attractive.

Occupy Scranton intends to push hard for these views at our regional Generally Assembly in Harrisburg this Saturday.

Sincerely,

Patrick Walker

Outreach Director, Occupy Scranton

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